

### Related Occupations

Services sales representatives must have sales ability and knowledge of the service they sell. Workers in other occupations requiring these skills include: Advertising, marketing, and public relations managers; insurance sales agents; manufacturers' and wholesale sales representatives; purchasing managers, buyers, and purchasing agents; real estate agents and brokers; sales engineers; securities, commodities, and financial services sales representatives; and travel agents.

### Sources of Additional Information

For details about career and certification information for services sales and marketing representatives, contact:

✦ Sales and Marketing Executives International, 5500 Interstate North Pkwy., Suite 545, Atlanta, GA 30328-4662.  
Internet: <http://www.smei.org>

## Travel Agents

(O\*NET 43021)

### Significant Points

- Training at a postsecondary vocational school or college or university is increasingly important for getting a job.
- Travel benefits, such as reduced rates for transportation and accommodations, attract many people to this occupation.
- Projected average employment growth reflects increases in spending on pleasure and business travel.

### Nature of the Work

Constantly changing air fares and schedules, thousands of available vacation packages, and a vast amount of travel information on the Internet can make travel planning frustrating and time-consuming. To sort out the many travel options, tourists and businesspeople often turn to travel agents, who assess their needs and help them make the best possible travel arrangements. Also, many major cruise lines, resorts, and specialty travel groups use travel agents to promote travel packages to the millions of people who travel every year.

In general, travel agents give advice on destinations and make arrangements for transportation, hotel accommodations, car rentals, tours, and recreation. They may also advise on weather conditions, restaurants, and tourist attractions, and recreation. For international travel, agents also provide information on customs regulations, required papers (passports, visas, and certificates of vaccination), and currency exchange rates.

Travel agents consult a variety of published and computer-based sources for information on departure and arrival times, fares, and hotel ratings and accommodations. They may visit hotels, resorts, and restaurants to evaluate their comfort, cleanliness, and the quality of food and service so they can base recommendations on their own travel experiences or those of colleagues or clients.

Travel agents also promote their services, using telemarketing, direct mail, and the Internet. They make presentations to social and special interest groups, arrange advertising displays, and suggest company-sponsored trips to business managers. Depending on the size of the travel agency, an agent may specialize by type of travel, such as leisure or business, or destination, such as Europe or Africa.

### Working Conditions

Travel agents spend most of their time behind a desk conferring with clients, completing paperwork, contacting airlines and hotels for travel arrangements, and promoting group tours. During vacation seasons and holiday periods they may be under a great deal of pressure. Many

agents, especially those who are self-employed, frequently work long hours. With advanced computer systems and telecommunication networks, some travel agents are able to work at home.

### Employment

Travel agents held about 138,000 jobs in 1998 and are found in every part of the country. More than 9 out of 10 salaried agents worked for travel agencies. Many of the remainder worked for membership organizations.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

The minimum requirement for those interested in becoming a travel agent is a high school diploma or equivalent. Technology and computerization are having a profound effect on the work of travel agents, however, and formal or specialized training is becoming increasingly important. The minimum requirement for those interested in becoming a travel agent is a high school diploma or equivalent. Technology and computerization are having a profound effect on the work of travel agents, however, and formal or specialized training is becoming increasingly important. Many vocational schools offer 6- to 12-week full-time travel agent programs, as well as evening and weekend programs. Travel agent courses are also offered in public adult education programs and in community and 4-year colleges. A few colleges offer bachelor's or master's degrees in travel and tourism. Although few college courses relate directly to the travel industry, a college education is sometimes desired by employers to establish a background in fields such as computer science, geography, communication, foreign languages, and world history. Courses in accounting and business management



*Travel agents compile information from various sources in order to plan their clients' travel itineraries.*

also are important, especially for those who expect to manage or start their own travel agencies.

The American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) offers a correspondence course that provides a basic understanding of the travel industry. Travel agencies also provide on-the-job training for their employees, a significant part of which consists of computer instruction. Computer skills are required by all employers to operate airline and centralized reservation systems.

Experienced travel agents can take advanced self or group study courses from the Institute of Certified Travel Agents (ICTA) that lead to the designation of Certified Travel Counselor (CTC). The ICTA also offers marketing and sales skills development programs and destination specialist programs, which provide a detailed knowledge of regions such as North America, Western Europe, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Rim.

Travel experience is an asset since personal knowledge about a city or foreign country often helps to influence clients' travel plans, as is experience as an airline reservation agent. Patience and the ability to gain the confidence of clients are also useful qualities. Travel agents must be well-organized, accurate, and meticulous to compile information from various sources and plan and organize their clients' travel itineraries. Other desirable qualifications include good writing, computer, and sales skills.

Some employees start as reservation clerks or receptionists in travel agencies. With experience and some formal training, they can take on greater responsibilities and eventually assume travel agent duties. In agencies with many offices, travel agents may advance to office manager or to other managerial positions.

Those who start their own agencies generally have had experience in an established agency. Before they can receive commissions, these agents usually must gain formal approval from suppliers or corporations, such as airlines, ship lines, or rail lines. The Airlines Reporting Corporation and the International Airlines Travel Agency Network, for example, are the approving bodies for airlines. To gain approval, an agency must be financially sound and employ at least one experienced manager or travel agent.

There are no Federal licensing requirements for travel agents. However, nine States—California, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington—require some form of registration or certification of retail sellers of travel services. More information may be obtained by contacting the Office of the Attorney General or Department of Commerce for each State.

### Job Outlook

Employment of travel agents is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2008. Many job openings will arise as new agencies open and existing agencies expand, but most openings will occur as experienced agents transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

Projected employment growth stems from increased spending on tourism and business travel over the next decade. With rising household incomes, smaller families, and an increasing number of older people who are more likely to travel, more people are expected to travel on vacation—and to do so more frequently—than in the past. Business travel should also grow as business activity expands. Further, managerial, professional, and sales occupations are projected to be among the fastest growing, and people in these occupations do the most business travel.

A variety of other factors will also lead to greater business for travel agents. For example, charter flights and larger, more efficient planes have brought air transportation within the budgets of more people, and the easing of Federal regulation of air fares and routes has fostered greater competition among airlines, resulting in more affordable service. In addition, American travel agents now organize more

tours for the growing number of foreign visitors. Also, travel agents are often able to offer various travel packages at a substantial discount. Although most travel agencies now have automated reservation systems, this has not weakened demand for travel agents.

Some developments, however, may reduce job opportunities for travel agents in the future. The Internet increasingly will allow people to access travel information from their personal computers and make their own travel arrangements. Further, suppliers of travel services are increasingly able to make their services available through other means, such as electronic ticketing machines and remote ticket printers. Also, airline companies have put a cap on the amount of commissions they will pay to travel agencies. The full effect of these practices, though, have yet to be determined, and many consumers will still prefer to use a professional travel agent to ensure reliability and to save time and, in some cases, money.

The travel industry is sensitive to economic downturns and international political crises, when travel plans are likely to be deferred. Therefore, the number of job opportunities fluctuates.

### Earnings

Experience, sales ability, and the size and location of the agency determine the salary of a travel agent. Median annual earnings of travel agents overall and in the passenger transportation arrangement industry, where most worked, were \$23,010 in 1998. Most travel agents earned between \$17,960 and \$28,430. The bottom 10 percent of travel agents earned less than \$13,770, while the top 10 percent earned over \$34,670.

Salaried agents usually enjoy standard benefits that self-employed agents must provide for themselves. Among agencies, those focusing on corporate sales pay higher salaries and provide more extensive benefits, on average, than those who focus on leisure sales. When they travel for personal reasons, agents usually get reduced rates for transportation and accommodations. In addition, agents sometimes take "familiarization" trips, at no cost to themselves, to learn about various vacation sites. These benefits attract many people to this occupation.

Earnings of travel agents who own their agencies depend mainly on commissions from airlines and other carriers, cruise lines, tour operators, and lodging places. Commissions for domestic travel arrangements, cruises, hotels, sightseeing tours, and car rentals are about 7-10 percent of the total sale, and for international travel, about 10 percent. Travel agents may also charge clients a service fee for the time and expense involved in planning a trip.

During the first year of business or while awaiting corporation approval, self-employed travel agents often have low earnings. Their income usually is limited to commissions from hotels, cruises, and tour operators and to nominal fees for making complicated arrangements. Established agents may have lower earnings during economic downturns.

### Related Occupations

Travel agents organize and schedule business, educational, or recreational travel or activities. Other workers with similar responsibilities include tour guides, meeting planners, airline reservation agents, rental car agents, and travel counselors.

### Sources of Additional Information

For further information on training opportunities, contact:

✦ American Society of Travel Agents, Education Department, 1101 King St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet:

<http://www.astanet.com/www/asta/pub/car/becomingagent.html>

For information on certification qualifications, contact:

✦ The Institute of Certified Travel Agents, 148 Linden St., P.O. Box 812059, Wellesley, MA 02181-0012.